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4 Liturgies - Engl. Ch. 7

FREE REMARKS
ON A
SERMON

E N T I T L E D,

The Requisition of Subscription to the Thirty nine Articles and Liturgy of the Church of England not inconsistent with Christian Liberty: To which are prefixed, Reasons against subscribing a Petition to Parliament for the Abolition of such Subscription.

In a LETTER to the *Author*.

BY A FRIEND TO RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.

We ought to obey GOD rather than man. Peter.

L O N D O N :

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ADVERTISEMENT
TO THE
READER.

THE writer of the following pages did not mean, to give in them a Dissertation on *Establiments*: but merely to shew the futility of what the Author of the *Sermon* has asserted on the subject: in the course of his *Remarks* he has been unavoidably led to speak of the *Petition* and *Petitioners*; and was from judgment induced to espouse their cause. But as the defence of them was not any part of his first intention, he purposely avoided entering upon the examination of *The Reasons against Subscription*; although it would not be difficult to shew, that they are of no greater weight, than the arguments contained in the *Sermon*.

A
L E T T E R.

REVEREND SIR,

I Should have begun this letter, with complaisantly asking your leave, to make some remarks on your sermon; were I not well assured, by the spirit it breathes, that you would be extremely backward to grant any indulgence, to one, who has the misfortune, not to hold religious establishments in the same veneration as yourself.

I think it extremely happy for the petitioners, that you did not comply with
B the

the invitation you received, to attend the association at the Feathers-Tavern, in the Strand.* For you being certain that “the infliction of punishment is essentially necessary to preserve religious institutions.†”—and persuaded that the petitioners mean “nothing less than a total subversion of the national establishment‡”—to what lengths might not your zeal for that church which has been “the boast and admiration of ages” have hurried you? We may be allowed to suppose, that at the least, you would have been impelled, agreeably to the laudable maxim of Count Zinzendorf, instead of answering the arguments of the petitioners, to have kicked their teeth down their throats.

I remember that some time ago, the late *benevolent* Samuel Roe, M. A. Vicar of Stotfold, in Bedfordshire, seemed de-

* Reasons, p. 1

† Sermon, p. 6.

‡ Reasons, p. 2.

firous of obtaining the office of Tongue-cutter-general to all schismatics, fanatics, &c. Now as you seem, from certain expressions in your performance, to be not one whit behind him, in your approbation of severe measures with such kind of persons; I cannot but think you would have proved a worthy successor, to this *meek-spirited* writer. The Monthly Reviewers expressed their doubts, whether, if the scheme was adopted, any person would be found willing to undertake this arduous business, after the decease of the said Samuel Roe, M. A.—But at that time you, Sir, had not stepped out from the press, *arrayed in terrors*—which is the only excuse they can make, for having entertained any doubts on this head. At that time, I thought the Reviewers deficient in their knowledge of the extent of bigotry; and having such an opportunity for triumphing over them, I do declare it to be my opinion, that they ought to ask your pardon, as pub-

lickly as they have made the offence, for throwing cold water on a scheme, which had it taken effect, might in the event, have proved very beneficial to you. For who can doubt, but the King, or his Parliament, would have settled a very handsome annuity, on the person employed in this effectual way of *silencing* those, who “propagate doctrines repugnant to the established institutions?”

I think myself very happy in living at such a distance from you, as makes it improbable I should ever come into your company; for both my teeth and tongue are very serviceable to me at present. Yet my *book* I doubt will meet with hard treatment. I fear it is destined, like the petition, *ex fumo dare lucem*.

But, pray Sir, is your spirit, the spirit of that church, which has been “the
“boast

“boast and admiration of ages?”—If it be, I do not wonder that ages have admired at such a church; but it fills me with wonder, that any persons should have boasted of it.

If, Sir, the church of England is of such a persecuting spirit; do you think she will esteem herself under any obligations to you, for making so public a declaration of what reflects so much disgrace upon her?—If she abhors severity on a religious account, will she not be filled with indignation against one of her own members, who gives the world so much reason to think the contrary?

You have brought yourself into a miserable dilemma, from which I cannot set you free; nor do I see any way for your escape.

The more I confider your fituation, the more I pity you. We will hope you mean well: but, Sir, you are unfortunate, the *stars* are your enemies. Who but a man under a baleful *astrological* influence, could have prefixed fuch a text, to fuch a difcourfe? Who but a man under a temporary infatuation, could have attempted to perfuade us to renounce our christian liberty, from thefe words, “ Stand faft in the “ *liberty*, wherewith Chrift has made “ us *free*.”

From this moft excellent text, you take occafion to enquire; “ firft, how far “ the right, which government affumes of “ requiring fubfcription from thofe who “ are appointed teachers of religion, is “ confiftent with christian liberty: and fe- “ condly, Whether the line drawn in the “ fubfcription required by the church of “ England, lays any unjuftifiable con- “ ftraint

“ strait on the consciences of real
“ christians.”*

Before you enter directly upon the
discussion of the first of these heads,
you determine to show us clearly, “ in
“ what christian liberty, in the plain
“ and obvious meaning of the gospel,
“ doth really consist.”†

“ It primarily implies,” you say, “ a
“ freedom from that heavy burthen of
“ useless ceremonies, with which the
“ judaizing profelytes to christianity
“ would have all christians charged.” ‡

Glad am I, Sir, to find, that in one
circumstance you are right. But, I
would ask you, did the apostle con-
demn the Jewish ceremonies, in order
to leave these things to the judgment of
the civil magistrate? The rites appointed

* Sermon, p. 2.

† Sermon, p. 2.

‡ Sermon, p. 2.

under the Mosaic dispensation, were instituted by God himself.—Were these abolished, that men, uninspired men, might injoin religious ceremonies of their own?—Who can believe it?

“ Christian liberty,” you say farther,
 “ imports sometimes a freedom *απο*
 “ *νομου του θανατου* (is not this Greek
 “ scrap in a sermon a little pedantic?) but
 “ never, as far I can find, an exemption
 “ from the laws of the land. Obedience
 “ to the civil powers I find enjoined by
 “ Christ himself, both by precept and
 “ example”*.

I did express a hope above that you meant well; but, Sir, shall I be deemed uncharitable, if I now express some doubt on that head? It is hardly possible to believe that a christian divine can be so *ignorant*, that Christ neither by precept

* Sermon, p. 2.

nor example enjoined obedience to the civil powers in matters of religion. The contrary is well known: for there is not one single command in the gospel on this subject; and Christ's example directly opposes such obedience. Did not our blessed Lord "propagate doctrines repugnant to the established institutions," of his country, and actually introduce another religion, very different from that of the state? The example of Christ is then, Sir, directly against you: it favours even *dissenters*, as well as the *associates*, as you *politely* call the *petitioners*.

I go on with my quotations from your most extraordinary sermon where I left off. "Christian liberty doth indeed indulge us in our own private opinions of points, upon which scripture hath not expressly decided; but christian liberty doth not authorize every idle dreamer to vent the wild flights of a
" dis-

“ distempered imagination in direct opposition to the civil powers, and the mode of christianity, established in the state.”*—As to idle dreamers, wild flights, and distempered imaginations, these are words of course with your party, by which you endeavour to prejudice weak minds. All men are idle dreamers, and persons of distempered imaginations, according to your ideas, who maintain different opinions from yourselves; and they indeed deserve to be so called, who suffer themselves to be disturbed at such appellations.—Let us leave out this absurd nonsense, and state what you have asserted agreeably to your *real meaning* thus: *Christian liberty doth not authorize an opposition to the civil powers, and the mode of christianity established in the state.*

With respect to opposing the civil powers in matters of religion—for you

* Sermon, p. 2.

know,

know, Sir, religion is the subject—every person must be sensible, agreeably to what I have observed above, that Christ himself was guilty of this kind of opposition to the civil powers. And you will no doubt be aware, that according to your sentiments, it was highly proper, on this account, nay, “essential to the “preservation of religious institutions” in the state, that “civil punishment “should be inflicted” upon him. The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine author of our holy religion, if your assertions be true, was very justly executed; for whatever was the *pretence*, we all know that he suffered for “propagating doctrines “repugnant to the established institutions.” Thus, Sir, you and your party, make the doctrine of the Cross a real *stumbling-block*, to every rational person; if your sentiments be *indeed* rational.

But,

But, “ the *mode* of Christianity established in the state must not be opposed”. Will you please, Sir, to tell the public, why the word *mode* is here inserted? Was it because the religion established in this country, could not with propriety be called Christianity, without some qualifying expression? — Numbers, Sir, will be of this opinion.

If you have courage sufficient, tell your fellow-citizens, how they ought to act if the established religion were Mohammedanism, and they in general Christians as at present? Would the *liberty wherewith Christ has made us free*, justify them for not conforming to Mohammedanism, and endeavouring to propagate the truths of Christianity? If you answer agreeably to your professed sentiments, *not*, Sir; for you tell us “ We cannot doubt the right of government to guard by civil punishments their own
“ re-

“ religious institutions; the infliction of
 “ which punishments on those who pro-
 “ pagate doctrines repugnant to the re-
 “ ceived and established institutions is
 “ essentially necessary”.†—What a severe
 persecutor of the Christians would you
 have been, had Providence made you a
 heathen magistrate before Christianity was
 established !—

You proceed, “ Christianity doth not
 “ countenance this” opposition to the
 civil powers in matters of religion,
 “ reason condemns it, sound policy dis-
 “ claims it.”

Christianity and reason, Sir, are in
 perfect agreement; and therefore, since
 I have proved, the former favours the
 opposition which you condemn, I shall
 not here enquire what is the determi-
 nation of reason on this subject. But,
 Sir, when you say that “ sound policy

† Sermon, p. 6.

“ dif-

“disclaims it,” I cannot refrain from pitying a minister of Christ turned a mere human politician. It was this “sound policy”, which you exalt above both reason and Christianity, by mentioning it last in this curious *climax*, that induced the Jews and Heathens to persecute the Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles—“this sound policy” was the parent of the Inquisition, and of many more dreadful evils than I shall pretend to enumerate.

I now attend you to the first article of your enquiry; namely, “How far
“the right which government assumes
“of requesting subscription from those
“who are teachers of religion, is consistent with Christian Liberty.”

I begin with a summary of your history of Establishments. If I misrepresent what you say, the press, thanks be to God! is free, and through that channel

channel you may do yourself justice.
I do not wish to be spared.

“ A sense of religion was implanted
“ in the mind of man from the begin-
“ ning, but after the admission of sin
“ into the world, civil government be-
“ came necessary, and the civil powers
“ seeing plainly *it* could not subsist in
“ force without religion, availed them-
“ selves of it, for the purposes of go-
“ vernment. This religion was to be
“ kept up by certain forms and cere-
“ monies.”—— Poor religion, to what
weak props art thou obliged for thy
support ! — “ and learned and prudent
“ men were appointed” by the civil power,
“ to inculcate its beneficial truths.” *

This is your history of establishments:
in which an attentive reader must be
struck with the art, by which poor Re-
ligion is brought into the power and

† Sermon, p. 3, 4.

under the controul of the civil magistrate.

Religion was insufficient to restrain men entirely from vices ; and thus civil government became necessary. After this state of the case, any person who had not some particular views to serve, would have proceeded as follows—therefore the business of the civil power was, to enforce by human punishments those moral duties, the observance of which a sense of religion was found too weak to effect.

According to this reasoning, which I think you will not be able to overthrow, the civil magistrate is properly no more than the servant, or at best the assistant of religion : whereas you describe him as seizing her by violence, dressing her to his own mind, and in short doing with her whatsoever seemed him good.

Your

Your history of Establishments is calculated to injure the cause you have espoused. It conveys a very unpleasing idea of the civil magistrate, who being invited as an auxiliary, turned invader; and must lead us to regard the religion which he presents us with, as more adapted to his private purposes, than our good; and of course induce us to seek after that “plain and simple religion, “ which was implanted in the mind of “ man from the beginning;”* and to confine ourselves, as much as possible, to those sacred books which represent and enforce it.

“ The first principles of religion,” you go on to observe, “ were plain “ and simple, yet in a short space of “ time was religion exhibited in so various modes that it scarce appeared

* Sermon, p. 4.

“ the same thing,” in different countries I suppose you mean : and you assign as the reason of the different appearance of religion, that “ it was incorporated with “ the civil government, and therefore “ partook of the complexion of the “ state” *.

It is very evident, Sir, that if you have not misrepresented the proceedings of the magistrate, religion could scarce appear the same thing it was at first, in *any country* in which it was incorporated with the civil government.

You inform us that at the first it was plain and simple ; but that when incorporated with the civil government, it was dressed up in certain forms and ceremonies, and made to partake of the complexion of the state. That is, in other words, that this venerable Lady,

* Sermon, p. 4.

who

who had been accustomed to dress in a plain and simple manner, like a *sober matron*, when seized on by the Magistrate, had her face daubed over with *rouge*, and was tricked out in laces and ribbons like a *harlot*. —What a change! how different a person must she appear in this her latter state, from what she was in her former!

There is something very curious in your reasoning, when you attempt to show, the *propriety* of adorning this “plain and simple religion” after so gaudy a manner. “Wise men” say you, “saw it was strongly implanted
“in the human mind, by the author
“of human nature; and a thing so beneficial to the welfare of the community was to be kept up by certain
“forms and ceremonies”*.

* Sermon, p. 4.

I will not enquire here, whether, instead of preserving pure religion, forms and ceremonies do not on the contrary destroy it; but must ask, what occasion there can possibly be for them, to preserve that which is strongly implanted in the human mind? Does instinct require forms and ceremonies to preserve it?

I find this *letter* will be much longer than I at first intended; for every paragraph strikes me with some absurdity or fallacy. Did you not, Sir,—tell us honestly—did you not publish this *Sermon*, in order to divert yourself, by observing the readiness with which the laity in general, admit for argument whatever their teachers would persuade them is such? Indeed, Sir, you should not have attempted to make yourself merry with the credulity of mankind,
at

at the expence of religion. It is too serious a subject and too sacred, to be employed as the instrument of pleasure.

I looked very grave, Sir, when I had read that passage in your sermon, in which you tell us, that religion was plain and simple till the civil governor interfered about it, that he altered its complexion, as well as disguised it with forms and ceremonies; and conclude, that therefore the interests of government and religion are common; and that each wants the influence of the other to preserve its peace and support its power*.

My logic teaches me to reason thus.

Religion was at the first plain and simple.

* Sermon, p. 5.

The civil magistrate changed its complexion, and otherwise disguised it.

Therefore the civil magistrate is not a proper person with whom to entrust the care of religion.

The premises are your own, the conclusion mine.

You, however, from the same premises have made out, how fairly let our readers determine; an *alliance between church and state*: from whence, as well as from your *extreme moderation*, we recognize the disciple of the *humble and charitable* bishop Warburton.

The alliance is formed. What must be done to preserve it? "It is necessary
" for those scrupulously to guard the
" one," (the established church,) " who
" hope to secure the other," (the civil government.*)

* Sermon, p. 6.

This,

This, Sir, is nothing but the old tale, of *No Bishops, no King*: expressed in different words. But can you, Sir, or any man believe, that the people would attempt to overthrow that government, which should indulge them with perfect liberty in religious matters? Or if the civil government should be brought into danger, by making any alterations in the ecclesiastical establishment more favourable to liberty, who must be the authors of that danger? Surely not they who approve the alterations; but those persons only, who “scrupulously guard” the church of England in its present state. That is, you and your friends. So that the odium you intended, by this observation, to throw upon the shoulders of others, has light unfortunately upon your own head.

I should be pleased to hear your reason, Sir, for being thus “scrupulous to
C 4 “guard”

“ guard” an establishment, which according to your own account, must be of a different complexion from the plain simple religion implanted at first in the mind of man; and also farther distinguished from it, by various rites and ceremonies, so as hardly to appear the same thing.

Whatever be this reason, (which some persons will guess at in a way not much to your credit) guarded and secured the politico-ecclesiastical establishment, you say, must be: and in order to impress this sentiment upon your readers, display your learning in exhibiting to them; the state of religious and civil polity in Pagan states; with which we have been all *wonderfully* edified; and no doubt but our *christian* governors, will esteem themselves under great obligations to you, for recommending the example of *heathen* states to their imitation.

I am

I am astonished that a man of letters, as you seem to be, whose education might be supposed to have enlarged his mind, and inspired him with generous sentiments, could tell, with seeming approbation, how “the wise and virtuous *Socrates*, was arraigned, tried, condemned and executed, for propagating doctrines repugnant to the established religion of the state.”

My heart bleeds for that venerable martyr to truth; nor can I refrain from detesting laws, which *suffer* wise and virtuous men to be arraigned, tried, condemned and executed. — You were very prudent in not adding to the above relation, that the Athenians became, after the death of *Socrates*, such true penitents for the cruelty with which they had treated this religious hero, that they put his accusers to death; notwithstanding he had opposed the religion of his country.

In

In the sense of all cool and dispassionate persons, one wise and virtuous man is of more value, than a legion of narrow-minded bigots; who would lay the consciences of their fellow-citizens under restraint, and keep the rod hanging over their backs, to oblige them to believe, or at least, profess to believe, as the civil magistrate shall direct.

To the above-quoted account you subjoin, that “ we cannot doubt the right “ of government most scrupulously to “ guard and preserve religious institutions.”—Now, Sir, I not only doubt, but with thousands and ten thousands, *deny* the right of government to *appoint* religious institutions, much more to *guard* and *preserve* them when appointed.

I grant that “ government,” as you say, “ has *assumed* a power, to inflict “ punishments on those who propagate “ doctrines

“ doctrines repugnant to the established
 “ institutions,” but cannot join with you,
 in “ seeing no reason to controvert its
 “ right.” For I do believe that the
 Jewish rulers, and Pilate† at their insti-
 gation, acted an unjustifiable part, in the
 case of our blessed Saviour: and that the
 Athenians, ought to have been as sensi-
 ble of the iniquity of *assuming* this power
 before, as they were after, the death of
 Socrates.

“ The compact” you say “ between
 “ the legislature and the people is mu-
 “ tual; that is, to preserve these secure
 “ in their property, and these are, on the
 “ other hand, bound to submit to the
 “ authority of that, to pay a dutiful obe-
 “ dience to its prohibitions and com-
 “ mands.”*

* Sermon, p. 6.

† Pilate knew perfectly well for what reason the Jews
 were so urgent to have Jesus crucified. *Matt.* xxvii. 18.

You

You surely meant, Sir, to forsake the pulpit, when you wrote this passage. It is not in character for a divine. If heaven and eternal happiness were of no importance, then indeed, a man might make no scruple to submit his faith to the appointment of the magistrate: but since we have a book, which came down from heaven, to instruct us in religion, we must be bound to submit to that in all things; and to obey none of the commands and prohibitions of men, be those men ever so exalted, which are contrary to, or different from, the religious commands or prohibitions of that book.

It is the constant practice of writers on your side the question, to make civil government and religious institutions appear to be one and the same thing; but, Sir, it is impossible this artifice should succeed, where men are not willing to be imposed upon. If you have occasion to
reprint

reprint your sermon, prefix to it as a motto—*Si vult populus decipi, decipiatur*—I do not recollect any one which will better express your general design.

Between our *civil* governors and us, there is no other than a *civil* compact. They are bound to secure our civil liberties, rights and properties; and we are bound in return to maintain them and yield them civil obedience, whilst they faithfully observe their part of the compact. But with respect to religion, we have *here*, infinitely more exalted governors, namely the King of kings, and his well-beloved son Jesus Christ.

If your *professed* be your *real* sentiments, you would have made as orthodox a Mohammedan in Turkey, as a Christian in England. But who can tell the real sentiments of so complaisant a courtier? Externally, as in duty bound, conformable to the religion of the state, who knows, whether

whether in your heart, you be either church of England man, or even Christian.

If *you* will not excuse me, I think the *public* will, for charging you with matchless effrontery, in calling Christianity only a "sketch of religion." * Your reason for thus insulting our Lord Jesus Christ, the author of this religion, I am fully apprized of. *The sketch wants filling up, and you mean, that our governors should undertake this business for us.*

I appeal from your judgment, Sir, to that of protestants at large, whether our Saviour left his religion imperfect? and, whether the New Testament does not contain the whole of that religion, which Christians are interested in, or ought to be concerned about?

* Sermon, p. 7.

You

You political divines dare not give a direct and explicit answer to these questions ; because if you did, in conformity to your professed sentiments, your own people would take the alarm, and join to hasten that reformation in the establishment, which you so much dread. But you have dropped, without being aware of the use which might be made of it, that which is abundantly sufficient to prove, what answer you would avow, were you not restrained by a fear of the consequences. “ Christianity is a sketch of religion ! ”

You go on to tell us, that “ a
 “ religion tending in so eminent a de-
 “ gree, as Christianity, to promote the
 “ social and moral virtues, could ne-
 “ ver be esteemed at variance with the
 “ best interests of mankind : wherever
 “ therefore the nature of it was pro-
 “ perly

“perly understood, it was received,
“encouraged, *establiſhed*.”*

This word *establiſhed* is very artfully ſtolen in here, that weak perſons might look upon encouraging and eſtabliſhing as the ſame thing: but, Sir, to encourage what is friendly to the beſt intereſts of mankind, does not imply any thing like your hierarchy, your *Imperium in imperio*.

In the above quotation we are favoured with a circumſtance, in the annals of the church, which has been entirely concealed from the knowledge of all Chriſtians till now diſcovered by you; and generously made public, for the good of your countrymen: This is, that Chriſtianity was not properly underſtood for the firſt three centuries. Even ſo long was it before it was eſtabliſhed: and yet you tell us, that wherever it was properly under-

* Sermon, p. 7.

ſtood

stood it was received, encouraged, established.

I shall mention one reason, why I think establishing it, to be no proof of its having been properly understood at this period; namely, because from this time, the church is agreed to have been, *Major divitiis, virtutibus minor*, more wealthy and more corrupt.

After all which has been said *pro* and *con*, on the subject of establishments, I have not been able to understand how it is possible to *establish religion* by human laws. I grant you a number of *men* may be *established* in rich benefices, under the notion of guarding and preserving religion; and this is your professed idea of establishments. But, dear Sir, ecclesiastical history fully proves, that *establishing* such *men* was *weakening* the interest of *Christianity*.

D

You

You indeed say they were appointed to guard Christianity from corruption; but you know no doubt, as well as I, that from the time they were appointed Christianity became more corrupt than before. And the tempers and manners of these *beneficed clergy* soon underwent a sensible change. They were no longer the meek and humble Christians they had been; but became proud, contentious, insolent and imposing — behold the blessed effects of establishments!

That there ought to be preachers, to urge the observance of Christian duties, no person can doubt; but these there were for three hundred years, before there was any established order of men to guard Christianity from corruption; and therefore so there might be still if Christianity were to dismiss this her guard. I could recommend a much better *guard* to her; viz. the Holy Scriptures. These would certainly preserve her

her from corruption, much better than any order of men whatsoever; for the latter are all liable to be *corrupted* themselves; it is not impossible but *they* might be induced, to obtrude upon men, instead of Christianity, those doctrines which were best suited to the political views of the civil magistrate; from whom they receive their authority, and upon whom they depend: but in the sacred Scriptures, Christianity will be ever preserved, in its original simplicity and excellence.

Sensible, I suppose, of the futility of all you have thus far advanced concerning Establishments, and of the impossibility of resting upon it, the right of government to demand subscription to Articles of Faith, you now endeavour to fix this right, upon a quite different foundation: and tell us

“ It is ridiculous to dispute the
“ right of the magistrate to require such

“ security,” as that of subscription, “ where the laws have given him a “ power to do it.”—It is ridiculous no doubt in this case to dispute his *legal* right, but we may still deny that he has a *moral or Gospel right*. If you mean only to assert the chief magistrate’s *legal* right in this Kingdom, you and I shall be found to be both in the same opinion: but in this case all you have hitherto said, and I have animadverted upon, means nothing, but merely to lengthen out the Sermon. If you design any thing more than a *legal* right, your argument fails; for the *law* can give no more than a *legal right*.

The very *petitioners*, whom you are so much displeased with, will acknowledge this kind of right; but, Sir, they know the laws of England are not like those of the Medes and Persians; and therefore very regularly apply to the Legislature, for a change, which may ease their consciences.

sciences. I cannot see how you, or I, or any other persons, the Legislature itself excepted, have ought to do with either the petition or petitioners.

When Englishmen feel themselves aggrieved, by any Law in being, they have an acknowledged right, to petition for the abolition of the Law. What alarms you therefore is no other than the exertion of that right, which belongs to every British subject. The petition, I dare say, will not be presented *vi et armis*; and the King and Parliament may act as they chuse when it is presented. And you will please to take notice, that even though they should make the proposed alteration, you will still have a Church of England as by Law established. Why then are you disturbed?

If the civil powers have the right of directing the consciences of their subjects, of appointing or establishing any
D 3 form

form of worship, and of making Rules, Canons, &c. respecting Church government, which is what you contend for, they have also as certain a right, to make any changes in their own religious institutions. Nor do I understand, how you can vindicate yourself, for interfering in a case, in which the civil powers alone, upon your own principles, are concerned. If the right of appointing religious institutions be lodged solely in the civil government, it must be great impertinence in you, and other writers on your side the question, an impertinence of which you yourselves must be sensible, to debate *before hand*, upon any steps it may possibly take, in matters relative to religion. And are you not aware also, that by now condemning alterations, you may chance, should the civil powers comply with the petition, to become guilty *à priori*, of censuring that very Church, which you must then defend? This is a consideration worthy the

the attention of you politico-ecclesiastical divines.

I now proceeded to your observation next in order to that last quoted.
 “ But not only the power, and the right,
 “ but the *propriety* of requiring such security as subscriptions, is most apparent.
 “ If you do not circumscribe the teachers
 “ within some bounds, their doctrines
 “ will soon become opposite as pole to
 “ pole.—Error will be grafted on error.
 “ Parties will be formed, divisions in the
 “ state will follow those in religion, and
 “ discord and confusion ruin both.” *

I shall make no other reply to this curious paragraph, than that it is *not true*: and refer you to the state of religion and government, in our Colonies in North America, as a proof of its being false. Teachers there are not circumscribed, and notwithstanding, no religious parties are formed, nor is either

* Sermon, p. 8.

religion or civil government ruined. But the inhabitants are more charitable to different sects and parties of Christians, than any where else; and as to civil Government, they behave just as well as the Mother-Country.

Now you undertake to answer the grand objection, to what you have been hitherto endeavouring to prove.

“ The usual reply to this is, had such
 “ doctrine prevailed two or three hundred years ago, what would have become of our boasted reformation? In
 “ answer to which, it will be sufficient
 “ to refer our adversaries, to a retrospect of that reformation. Let them
 “ look back on those intestine feuds, and
 “ civil broils, on those dreadful scenes
 “ that a long course of years presented,
 “ the state almost torn to pieces, and
 “ the land deluged with blood; ere the
 “ wished for reformation was affected.”*

* Sermon, p. 8.

This

This picture is highly coloured indeed. — But let that pass. — If the land was deluged with blood, who was the butcher? I answer, the *civil magistrate*, who having taken religion into his keeping, and dressed her as he pleased, dragooned, hanged, or burned, all who thought her head-dress too high, or her train too long, or who dared to insinuate, that a plain round patch would have become her face, better than one pinked into a hundred angles. Nay, he not only butchered those who thought she was ornamented more than was necessary, but them also who were of opinion, that she might still appear to more advantage, were the gaudiness of her dress increased.

It was that very imposing spirit, by which the petitioners find themselves aggrieved, which occasioned the evils, of which you present us so horrible a

†

picture.

picture. The civil magistrate threw off the yoke of the Roman Pontiff and resolved to be *Pope* himself: and as a kind of Inquisition is very expedient for the maintenance of such an office, he opened the stores of the infernal arsenal, to establish himself in his *assumed* authority. Thus vast numbers fell by the arm of the civil power; of that very power which, if your account be true, was called in to the aid of religion; but which most iniquitously acted as her foe, binding her in fetters, and violating, most outrageously violating, her mild and benevolent orders.

As the imposing spirit did so much hurt *then*, it is certainly proper at any time, to make such regulations in the state, as may render it incapable of doing further mischief.

If the petition succeeds, and any disturbances follow; you and your party,
Sir,

Sir, must be the active men. The evil *now* must proceed as *before*, from the advocates of imposition, and not from the friends of liberty.

Now with what face, Sir, can you attempt to deter your countrymen from approving of, or joining in a scheme, because of the evil consequences which may follow, when, if the mischief be done, it must be done by you and your friends? — This is not reasoning with us, Sir, but threatening us. It is telling us, that if any alteration shall take place, you and your party will deluge the land with blood. I tremble with horror as I write it: but beg you to consider, opposition to the received institutions, even in the peaceable way of petitioning, is what you yourself condemn; and surely then, you will not suffer your zeal to hurry you into downright rebellion in opposing them.

You

You are now come to the second head of your discourse; after having proved nothing, but that you love religious establishments, hate the petitioners, and look upon persecution as a necessary instrument of government.

I would have you to understand it is mere complaisance in me, to take your second head into consideration; since that depends upon the first, and the first I have confuted. But it would be almost as rude to take leave of you here, as it would have been to have gone out of church, had I heard this extraordinary sermon delivered, before you had concluded it.

“ The next subject of consideration
 “ is, Whether the line drawn in the
 “ subscription required by the constitu-
 “ tion of England, lays any unjusti-
 “ fiable

“ fiable constraint on the confciences of
“ real Christians.”

“ In order to this, let us caft back
“ our eyes on that ever memorable
“ time, when the clouds of error were
“ difperfed, and the pure religion of
“ Chrift fhone forth in our land with
“ original luftre.” * — How comes it to
pafs, Sir, that you political divines, are
eternally contradicting yourfelves? How
fhould Chriftianity appear with its ori-
ginal luftre *here*, when you fay that
religion, as foon as incorporated with
the civil government, has her complexion
altered to that of the ftate; and is or-
namented with, or rather has her beau-
ties concealed by, forms and ceremonies.
You indirectly concede, that “ the Ar-
“ ticles of Faith, as drawn up by the
“ Reformers, are not in every minute
“ point true.” What is then become,

* Sermon, p. 9.

Sir,

Sir, of the original lustre of Christianity? It was no doubt, *originally*, exactly true in every minute point.

The persons, you say, who composed the Liturgy, were “men for learning, abilities, for moderation and candour, unexceptionable.”* — They were, Sir, on the whole, well-meaning and useful men: but it makes me smile to hear persons talk of their abilities. An excellent specimen of these abilities, we have in a late pamphlet, entitled, *Free Thoughts on the subject of a farther reformation of the church of England*; published by Dr. Dawson.

Cranmer was the principal divine employed in this work; and who can help being diverted with the Archbishop's proving *Original Sin*, from the ninth and tenth Commandments; and convicting *children* of this sin, from their crying

* Sermon, p. 9.

when

when their nurſes have laid them in an uneaſy poſture, and their being diſpleaſed when their toys are taken from them.

“ In the ninth and tenth command-
 “ ments,” ſays this man of *abilities*,
 “ you ſhall learn, that evil luſts and ap-
 “ petites which come unto us from our
 “ firſt father *Adam* be ſins, and that no
 “ man or woman, no not infants in their
 “ mother’s womb, do live without ſuch
 “ luſts and appetites.—Theſe appetites
 “ and deſires we may perceive to be even
 “ in infants which lie in their cradle.
 “ For when ſuch young babes do not lie
 “ ſoftly, or be grieved with thirſt, hunger
 “ or cold, they cry unpatiently. Like-
 “ wiſe when we ſhew them any pleaſant
 “ thing to their eyes, and ſuddenly again
 “ take it from them, we ſee them weep.
 “ And theſe be plain and evident tokens,
 “ that infants newly born be given to
 “ their own wills and appetites, and
 “ are

“ are finners, for as much as they transgress this commandment, *Thou shalt not desire,*” &c. &c.

I had much rather be silent, on the subject of the reformers moderation. It is an unpleasant task, to expose the frailties of those, who have been the *friends of mankind*. But the cause of truth requires it: for every excellence, supposed to reside in these *fathers* of the present church of England, has its effect upon the members of that church; disposing them to an implicit faith, in all which they have taught: and this is the reason, indeed, why you have ascribed to them those qualities, to which they have no claim. I wish, Sir, you and all persons that chuse to shelter themselves, in their religious disputes, under the fence of some great names, would learn not to extol their leaders too highly; for this incites their antagonists to examine: the misrepresentation is discovered; and both their
 leaders

leaders and themselves disgraced—So much by way of exhortation to you; and apology for my contributing to make still more publickly known, the reformers want of moderation.

In 1543, the archbishop proposed a bill, by which “all churchmen that
“preached contrary to the book set out
“by the bishops, for the first offence,
“were required to recant; for the second, to abjure and carry a faggot;
“but were to be burned for the third.”*
If you call this moderation, you must call it so by comparison. Others might have wished to have burned the supposed heretic sooner; but the *burning clause*, can in no respect be thought really moderate, or even proper, by any but those, who like you, Sir, see punishment to be essentially necessary in such cases.

* Burnet's Abridgment, &c. 5th edit. London, 1719, Vol. I. p. 273, 274.

I will copy from the same edition of Burnet's Abridgment,* a passage which will set the disposition of the reformers in a more striking light.

“ There were some *Anabaptists* at this
 “ time in *England*, that were come over
 “ out of *Germany*; so a commission was
 “ granted to some bishops and others to
 “ search them out; and to proceed against
 “ them. Several persons were brought
 “ before them, and did abjure their er-
 “ rors; which were, *That there was not a*
 “ *trinity of persons; that Christ was not*
 “ *God, and took not flesh of the virgin;*
 “ *and that a regenerate man could not sin.*
 “ One *Joan Bocher*, called *Joan of Kent*,
 “ denied that Christ took flesh of the
 “ substance of his mother; she was out
 “ of measure vain and conceited of her
 “ notions, and rejected all the instruc-
 “ tion which was offered her with scorn:

* Burnet's Abridgment, Vol II. p. 80, 81, 82.

“ So she was condemned as an obstinate
 “ heretic, and delivered to the secular
 “ arm. But it was very hard to persuade
 “ the King to sign the warrant of her
 “ execution; *he thought it was an instance*
 “ *of the same spirit of cruelty, for which*
 “ *the reformers condemned the Papists.* It
 “ was hard to condemn one to be burned
 “ for some wild opinions, especially when
 “ they seemed to flow from a disturbed
 “ brain. But *Cranmer* persuaded him,
 “ that he, being God’s lieutenant, was
 “ bound, in the first place to punish those
 “ offences committed against God: He
 “ also alledged the laws of *Moses* for pu-
 “ nishing blasphemers; and *he thought*
 “ *errors that struck against the Apostles*
 “ *Creed, ought to be capitally punished.*
 “ These things did rather silence than sa-
 “ tisfy the young King. He signed the
 “ warrant with tears in his eyes, and said
 “ to *Cranmer*, that since he resigned up
 “ himself in that matter to his judgment,

“ if he finned in it, it should lie at his
 “ door. This struck the archbishop;
 “ and both *he* and *Ridley* took her into
 “ their houses, and tried what reason,
 “ joined with gentleness could do. But
 “ she was still more and more insolent;
 “ so at last she was burned, and ended
 “ her life very indecently, breaking out
 “ often in jeers and reproaches, and was
 “ looked on as a person fitter for *Bedlam*
 “ than a *stake*. Some time after that a
 “ *Dutchman*, *George Van Parre*, was also
 “ condemned and burned, for denying
 “ the divinity of Christ, and saying, that
 “ the father only was God. He had led
 “ a very exemplary life, both for fasting,
 “ devotion, and a good conversation, and
 “ suffered with extraordinary composed-
 “ ness of mind. *These things cast a great*
 “ *blemish on the reformers; it was said, they*
 “ *only condemned cruelty when it was exer-*
 “ *cised on themselves, but were ready to*
 “ *practise it when they had power. The*
 “ *Papists made great use of this afterwards*
 “ in

“ *in Queen Mary’s time, and what Cran-*
 “ *mer and Ridley suffered in her time, was*
 “ *thought a just retaliation on them from that*
 “ *wise providence, that dispenses all things*
 “ *justly to all men.*”—I shall make no re-
 flections.

But the reformers were not only men,
 “ for learning and abilities, for modera-
 “ tion and candour unexceptionable;”
 but also, “ men, so free from prejudice,
 “ that, at the risk of every thing that is
 “ usually held most dear, they renounced
 “ the erroneous doctrines and practice in
 “ which education had trained them up,
 “ &c.”*—This, Sir, is a misrepresenta-
 tion. For the King being at the head of
 the reformation, the interest of both cler-
 gy and laity certainly lay, in humouring
 this disposition of his; by renouncing the
principles of their education.

* Sermon, p. 9, 10.

“ The

The convocation in 1536, had violent disputes concerning the reformation; “ but
 “ the contention had been sharper if the
 “ King had not sent some articles to them
 “ to be considered by them, and so *they*
 “ *whose chief design it was to recommend*
 “ *themselves to preferment, by the readiness*
 “ *of compliance with him in all points, agreed*
 “ *to his Articles.*”* “ These articles were
 “ signed by *Cromwell*, the two archbishops,
 “ sixteen bishops, forty abbots and priors,
 “ and fifty of the lower house.”†

I with pleasure join you, in honouring those of the reformers, “ who signed the
 “ invaluable legacy of the reformed religion with their blood.” They had employed themselves so long, in searching for arguments against the Papists, that at length their judgments were convinced;

* Burnet's Abridgment, Vol. I. p. 168.

† Ditto, p. 169.

and

and they died worthy martyrs to their real sentiments.

But I must remind you, Sir, that you cannot, in consistency with what you have before advanced, regard these men truly in an honourable light.—Affairs were changed at the time the principal reformers suffered: the nation had been reconciled to the see of *Rome*; and the *Protestants* now opposed established institutions. They therefore deserved death in *England*, as much as *Socrates* did in *Athens*; whose execution you quote with approbation.

I am quite tired, Sir, with pointing out the absurdities and contradictions in your extraordinary Sermon; and will therefore hasten to a conclusion. There is no end of *remarking* on a piece, in which every paragraph, and almost every sentence, furnishes something to criticize.

I see

I see many more things highly exceptionable in your publication, which I have passed over in silence; so that you cannot say, I have taken all advantages.

I must finish my *remarks*, with some observations on the *mode* of sermonizing, you have adopted.—Your discourse, Sir, is historical, not argumentative: and the history is not always true. But if it were, no conclusion can be drawn from the *reality* of a fact to the *propriety* of it.

If the civil power *did* seize on religion, alter her complexion, and trick her out in forms and ceremonies; this will not prove it had a right so to do.

If the laws in *England* have given a right to government, to require subscription to Articles of Faith; it remains to be shown, that the laws are, in this instance, rational and Christian.

If

If government *has assumed* a power of inflicting punishments, on those who propagate doctrines repugnant to the established institutions ; it is most reasonable to suppose, that *assumed* power cannot be justifiable in its exertion.

If imposing spirits, such as yours, *have* deluged the land with blood formerly, for amendments in religion ; this should teach all who find themselves inclined to impose, to check this inclination ; to be content with enjoying their own liberty, and to leave others the free enjoyment of theirs.

If the reformers *were really* such men as you represent them, still there is no reason for punishing persons, who do not agree with them in sentiment ; nor for making laws to oblige all to profess their opinions. The meanest subject has as great a right to think for himself, and to

F

propagate

propagate his sentiments, if not hurtful to civil government, as the most exalted ; nay, as the chief magistrate himself.

If *you* think it essentially necessary to civil government, to punish those who propagate doctrines repugnant to the established institutions ; I rejoice, so may the petitioners, and so will vast numbers of your own Church, that you are not in power.

If to secure rational Christianity from errors and abuses, and to transmit pure to posterity so invaluable a blessing, a certain form was composed comprehending Articles of religious and civil import ; — as you say — * you have yourself shewn the absurdity of such a procedure, by asserting, what all rational men will agree to ; namely, that “ if “ found arguments properly urged, will

* Sermon. p. 9.

“ not

“ not conciliate an uniformity of belief
“ in disputable points, all other means
“ must fail.” † And,

If this your last quoted observation
be true ; your Sermon is absolutely good
for nothing.

I now take leave of you, with declar-
ing, on the word of an honest man,
and a Christian, that I bear you no
ill-will ; and should take pleasure in
doing you, though unknown, any real
service. I am,

Reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

A friend to religious Liberty. .

† Sermon, p. 10.

F I N I S.

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